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Now, Total Control

Communes for China's Peasants

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The leader of war in the Formosa Bloc has pulled news abroad of the most revolutionary step taken by the Chinese Communists since they swept into power nine years ago.

By the end of this month, Red China's 800,000,000 peasants will own almost nothing except the tattered blue clothing that covers their scrawny bodies.

Dedicated Communist Party workers are "herding" them into "communes," where Chairman Mao Tse-tung, their leader, is recently described as "a communist basic unit of society."

Most of China's peasants had been communized for at least a couple of years. From now on, what they produce no longer will belong to the collectives which are passing out of existence—but to the state itself. The individual and the state are to be one. The last bonds of freedom is being wrung out of the people, the ultimate measure of control exerted over them.

Even Communal Chopsticks

By the end of September, only ten weeks after the Communists put full steam on the campaign, 90.6 per cent of all peasant households had been communized. Peking Radio reported the other day, Communization of tribal places in such faraway provinces as Kansu and Yunnan is to be completed within a few weeks, the radio boasted.

In the great cities, the Party cadres are proceeding only a little slower, with no inhabitants to be dragged into state-owned and factory communes within a year.

What the communists are committin to mean in the regime's chattered "menu" is typified at the dining table. Hereafter, all Chinese will eat all their meals in messhalls; they will own not even a pair of chopsticks. They will pay in ration coupons, issued on the basis of how much labor each has contributed to the state.

A controlled diet thus is becoming part of a controlled life. What more bitter blow to a people known the world over as gourmets?

What stirred Mr. Mao to foment this new revolution?

Two years ago, it may be recalled, the Chinese leader invited his people to "let the hundred flowers of thought bloom." Unhappily, many took him at his word. The chairman soon learned who were the "weeds," the most dangerous enemies of the regime among them. As a result, "thought remolding" came into being. Unhappily strengthened, the Party's grip on the populace.

During the better part of the past year, Mr. Mao has been touring the countryside, divining what is wrong with the regime and mulling over what could be done about it. The commune scheme was born in his mind, observers of the Chinese scene believe, out of an increasing spurt of desperation and despair.

One Up on the Soviets

There "long had" been peasant "hikes" of grain between harvest and sowing to prevent the peasants from hiding and eating too much of it. This the regime's chief source of capital to acquire more of the financing of the top-communist state, industrialization, and into modern nationhood.

the people would have to eat even less. Controls embodied in communism would give the state a better grasp of all that the peasants produced.

The theory Mr. Mao worked out would assure knew his reputation as a master Communist planner. The Soviet Russians themselves had failed in an effort years ago to push through their "agro-gorod" system of farm cities. Mr. Mao's communes, even more elaborate, would go the Russians home better. Ironically, their first production has come at the very time of Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's dismantling of farm controls through the abandonment of the machine tractor stations.

The communes are being organized along military lines, under military discipline. Subdivisions of them are being designated as battalions and regiments. Thus, it is broadcast, quickly can be converted into fighting units.

But most oblique here doubt that their creation has any direct connection with the struggle in the Formosa Strait. Peking propagandists would have the world believe that communization is being accompanied by joyous gatherings, drums and cymbals are sounded and firecrackers exploded to mark the opening of a new chapter in the peasant life.

How, indeed, do the peasants feel about this new chapter?

Let us go back to history. A big reason for the Chinese Communists' original success was their cry, "We are the landlords." The Chinese peasants had valued their good earth as no free labor people, rallied to the revolution because they gratefully accepted land seized from the landlords. But this time, land was taken away from them—except for a plittance of space in which to raise pigs, chickens and a sparsity of vegetables—as collectivization was forced upon them. Strike-down strikes were common, though. These were ruthless, summary.

Now the peasants are to lose their private plots, and all personal privacy besides.

The collectives are being amalgamated into the communes. Communes are as big as counties, embracing more than 20,000 households. Under the Party's watchful eye, the commune is taking the place of local government. "Worker, peasant, teacher, student and militiaman merge into one." All political, economic, cultural, social and military institutions are being reformed along communal lines.

What else has this meant in human terms? Children are being delivered to communal nurseries. Families will move into barracks as fast as they are built. Even graveyards are being communalized.

The New "Wage Slaves

Members of the communes will be assigned to the field or to local factories without regard to their wishes, becoming "wage slaves" in the most literal sense of the term which the Communists employ to indict capitalism. And all must work so that they may eat, however little it may be.

Besides glorifying communal living, the Communists justify the communes as a means of speeding the "great leap forward" in production of all kinds. It will bring new efficiency to human

OCT 22 1958

'Hell' in China

Two reporters in these columns have fresh light on what is now happening in Communist China and repercussions in the Communist bloc. A Chinese educated in this country, but who had to the mainland and then gone to report, "The whole country is hell." Sufferings of the people. It is hell."

Our Warsaw correspondent reported when Eastern European Communists have been set the Chinese communes, a system of socialization which is regimenting and militarizing Chinese people with a tightness and severity has no modern precedent. Peking is not a system of social organization as a proper of full perfect communism, but not what the Eastern Europeans had communism was going to be like. A writer has perhaps characterized the communes best by describing them as aization of Stalinism and feudalism, a prescription for Utopia.

During the past two months there mounting evidence that disrupts what is going on in China exists not only in Europe, but also in the highest circles in No other explanation will suffice for that the Soviet press has kept in the dark as to the nature of the communes and Peking's claims that the suns are the road to communism. One problem for Moscow is the fact that in Peking's present ideological position is that China, not Russia, is now leading socialist camp's progress to full communism.

There is still another aspect of the Communists in Moscow and Eastern Europe to consider. The tremendous exertions extorted from the Chinese people demanded for the purpose of increasing China's military-economic strength as rapidly as possible. It must be assumed work of China's more than half billion men done under the lash, will be produced that Communist China's military-economic will grow, perhaps, even grow rapidly, militarily strong China, with a powerful industry, be satisfied with the present distribution of land and other resources between its own vast population and the smaller population in the Soviet and Eastern Europe. There would seem to be to think about in these developments, for us, but also for those who make Warsaw, Prague, Bucharest, Budapest, and Moscow.

What else has this meant in human terms? Children are being delivered to communal nurseries. Families will move into barracks as fast as they are built. Even graveyards are being communalized. effort, they preach. The rate of labor utilization will rise to 100 per cent. Many observers believe that the Communists, in the economic sphere, already had built up more than they could have. Despite some farm and industrial advances, production increase has failed to keep pace with a birthrate surpassing the population at some 14,000,000 a year. Mr. Mao, well aware of this, doubtless had it in mind when formulating his communal theory.

The communes probably will be the supreme test of Mr. Mao's ability at planning and administration. He may succeed in making them stick, but only at the cost of great suffering.